

WILLIAM ROSENSTEIN & SONS Co.**WHOLESALE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

950 N. KEYSER AVENUE P.O. BOX 117 SCRANTON, PA. 18504
(570) 346-5771 • 1-800-241-0371 • FAX 969-2620

March 27, 2008

Standardization Section, Fresh Products Branch
Fruit and Vegetable Programs
Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S.D.A.
1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Room 1661
South Building, Stop 0204
Washington, DC 20250-0240

To Whom It May Concern:

Subject: Proposed change of grade standards of grapes

The California Grape and Tree Fruit Shippers currently have proposed a change to the current grade standards that have existed for over 50-60 years. Unlike most consumer groups in the world who are concerned with food safety, this proposed change lowers the current standards and raises deep concerns that our watchdog of United States citizens, the United States Department of Agriculture is seriously conceding power to these politically motivated changes.

There is an old saying "It's not about the money.... It's about the money." Well this particular issue puts the grower and shippers of grapes against the consumer; namely the wholesaler and retail vendors who sell their merchandise to the PUBLIC.

Current standards allow 15% condition defects and it still makes "good delivery standards". Defects consist of soft berries, wet and sticky berries, grapes that have internal discoloration, along with grapes that are classified as SHATTER BERRIES (grapes that are detached from the bunch). The proposed change the U.S.D.A. is considering is to allow an additional 5% of shatter berries and they would still be considered to be of "Good Delivery Standards".

Now think about this for a minute, Mrs. Consumer goes to the supermarket and purchases a bag of grapes and when she gets home to eat them there are grapes that are rolling around in the bottom of the bag for an undetermined amount of time. That's the important question, because as time goes by a detached berry loses its shelf life considerably quicker than an attached berry. Why does a berry fall off of the branch? The answer is that it is in fact a WEAKER BERRY. It can be a weaker berry for a variety of reasons, including transportation, handling, overripe, etc. It didn't fall off the bunch because it was as strong as the other berries, that's for sure. By falling off of the bunch you now have a break in the skin of the berry, thereby leaving it more susceptible

to mold, yeast, microorganisms of a variety of sorts along with other airborne toxins. Will they harm you if you consume these, probably not in most cases. But how about the case that they do, after it happens it's too late. Name one good reason to put yourself at a **HIGHER RISK IN TODAY'S SOCIETY OF FOOD SAFETY.**

The grape shippers are telling you that they would like the standards changed because of today's packing technology. For years they were always packed in a 22/23TKV lug and packed 8-10 bunches in a box. Their claim is that since they are in bags that Mr. Retailer has no shrinkage and that they get to sell all of the grapes even if they are in the bottom of the bags rolling around. The shipper would have you believe that 80% of the consumers in fact eat the loose berries. How about asking them which they would prefer to eat?? I'm sure 100% of them said the attached berries. Again, why put one at a higher risk than current grade standards? It makes no sense, unless you are the shipper and you want higher profits!!!

Approximately ten years ago the shipper redesigned their containers from a TKV(half wood and half corrugated) to a 100% corrugated box. Why? Easy cost savings. They also changed from a 22/23 lb. box of grapes in a box to 18/19lb., why? They can fit more on a truck approximately 300 cases and charge any additional up charge at 1.35 per box for cooling and palletization or \$405 per load additional!

In the last year or two the profits of the shippers have not been what they would have liked because the crop wasn't as good of quality as prior years. Hence, more SHATTER (weaker berries). Their answer, lower the standards and allow more shatter! Bottom line higher profits for the shipper.

The original reason for the re-designing their container from a 22/23 lb box to a 18/19 was because according to their market studies this container that took 12-18 months to design and test allowed for the most protection for the fruit hence, less bruising and less shatter. What happened to their so called superior packaging that was supposed to give you a better box of grapes to the consumer? Their answer is to let the consumer accept a lower grade standard to offset their higher cost of doing business safely. MY QUESTION IS EASY! If in fact through your new packing and palletization methods you were supposed to raise the quality and condition of your merchandise, I believe in today's FOOD SAFETY TIMES that someone should step up to the plate and say enough is enough. It's in fact time to re-visit our current grade standards and instead of lowering them I believe that it's time to raise them. How about instead of a 5% lower standard I propose a 5% raise in our current standards.

NAPAR has spent \$12,500 with a highly reputable firm who does safety tests for ecoli and other toxins. While they don't say that shatter grapes are dangerous the consensus is that they definitely have a shorter shelf life.

I urge you to send a message to all our shippers that we will not tolerate anything but the **HIGHEST FOOD AND SAFETY STANDARDS.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jay Rosenstein", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jay Rosenstein
Vice-President
Wm. Rosenstein & Sons Company

Faxed: March 27, 2008
(202) 720-8871

WILLIAM ROSENSTEIN & SONS Co.**WHOLESALE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

950 N. KEYSER AVENUE P.O. BOX 117 SCRANTON, PA. 18504
(570) 346-5771 • 1-800-241-0371 • FAX 969-2620

COVER SHEET

DATE

3/27/08

TO

Standardization Section, Fresh Products Branch
Fruit + Vegetable Programs
Agricultural Marketing Service USDA

FROM

JAY ROSENSTEIN

NUMBER OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER)

4

REMARKS